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ABSTRACT

One in a series of studies of experiments in new audiovisual techniques in Europe and the situations in some member countries, this paper traces the development of radio in Italy. Opposing views about radio broadcasting (public monopoly vs. freedom of broadcasting) are examined, and the various political and legal aspects of communications in Italy presented in case studies of several radio stations. Experiments with social and cultural significance are emphasized, with less detail supplied for purely commercial stations. Information for this study was drawn primarily from documents, which are cited in the report, and from recorded interviews with leading participants in several experiments. A short bibliography on broadcasting and mass communication is included.
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THE RADIO PHENOMENON IN ITALY

by Roberto Faenza

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SUMMARY

As this report goes to press, Italy, after 30 years of total "moderation" and "chaste behaviour" in the field of broadcasting and mass communications (with a single state broadcasting monopoly from the fall of Fascism till the present day), has suddenly been invaded by an army of radio stations (over 400!) and television channels (a few dozen) which are laying siege to the fortress of monopoly, to tear it down according to some or make it more democratic according to others. It seems like the start of a great adventure or a story full of suspense.

It is undoubtedly a fact that the situation in Italy, where hundreds of what were originally "pirate" and are now legal stations are gaining the right of citizenship just when the government and the majority parties seemed to have reached agreement on a reform of the public monopoly, must appear at the very least intriguing and abounding in material for Italian scholars as well as foreign observers.

In drafting this report for the Council of Europe, we have borne in mind the international background to the Italian experiments and we have tried to analyse situations and extrapolate any factors which could serve as standards of measurement and evaluation for the purpose of comparisons with other countries and different contexts.

Thus we have related the Italian story starting from the opposing views in the current debate ("public monopoly" versus "freedom of broadcasting"), from an examination of the various legal and political aspects (who is for and who is against either form of communications), from the analysis of a few stations and a few cases (local communications and/or national information networks). We have made an effort throughout to bear in mind the fact that the subject of radio as a whole cannot be anatomised with purely technical or specific instruments, and should instead be viewed in wider terms touching on the sphere of society and politics.

In our approach, we have given preference to the presentation of documents, which have been frequently referred to in the body of the report, and less obviously perhaps to interviews recorded "in the field" with the leading participants in this or that experiment, trying in each case to give as much space as possible to the opinions expressed.

Running through the paragraphs which make up the report, we note there has been a constant effort to collect facts and examples which can serve as points of reference (for the same

reason as we have chosen to dwell on experiments with a social and cultural significance, omitting to go into any great detail concerning the purely commercial stations) for a study which attempts to go beyond the mere chronicle of facts and to sketch a few outlines for use in future plans. The questions which are in fact of interest nowadays, and not only in Italy, to students and observers of communications concern above all the trendlines of a phenomenon more common to all than one tends to imagine and which is clearly still in the making. Although we begin with a study of methods of communication, we arrive in conclusion at the theme of participation and social living. At the end of the report itself, we have attached a short bibliography on the subject of broadcasting and mass communications in general, which we hope may prove useful to readers.

FOREWORD

This study is part of a series on experiments in new audiovisual techniques in Europe and the situation in some member countries. It forms part of the preparatory documentation for a symposium on European experiments in local radio and cable television which will be held in Strasbourg in May 1977.

This study was commissioned by the Council of Europe as part of the cultural programme of the Council for Cultural Co-operation.

The opinions expressed in it are those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect either the views of policy of the Council of Europe or its member states.

CONTENTS

1. Preface: the Italian "case"
2. Radio, from America to Europe
3. Thirty years of monopoly
4. Political positions in relation to the monopoly and the new situation
5. The liberation of "pirate" radio
6. From the voice of the community to the voice of the factory - the documents speak
7. Appraisal of experiments and comparison with other countries
8. Comments and criticism
9. Political positions and proposals for the future
10. Factors in assessment
11. The development of a potential
12. Bibliography

1. Preface: the Italian "case"

The subject to be discussed in this study is the use of radio as a force in society, its power and the consequences of that power in the Italian context.

Before doing so, we must situate the problem in terms of the fight for freedom of information, which has been waged so widely and fiercely in Italy that in this respect the country may be said to represent a special "case". It is not because of any particular or technological considerations that Italy has been so massively invaded by the "radio phenomenon", for it is only one manifestation of an all-embracing social and political situation.

Analysis of the information media (from written press to radio-television) shows, first of all, that towards the end of the 1960s (and especially after 1968) the Italian information world went through a series of hitherto unprecedented transformations. The first definite signs of a crisis in the traditional information media, and of their loss of credibility, goes back to 12 December 1969, when a fascist bomb caused a massacre in a Milan bank; the following day both newspapers and television endorsed the fallacious hypotheses of the investigators, announcing that the anarchists were behind the massacre and shamelessly describing Pietro Valpreda, anarchist and dancer, as "the bloodthirsty monster", in a headline on the front page of the Corriere della Sera, the daily with the largest circulation in Italy.

Under pressure from militant workers and students, however, the contradictions within the media soon made their appearance. Whole editorial teams began challenging the "truth" of the authorities and the principle of authoritarianism. Independent local and national newspapers sprang up, new ways of producing "social" information were tried out, new forms of self-managed communications developed, and by 1972 the most powerful information machine in the country, the national radio-television network, was in a state of crisis. After 2 years of procrastination and painful conflicts, a decision of the Constitutional Court (July 1974) ordering the free use of television, and a new law to avert the collapse of the monopoly, the political forces were compelled to come to an agreement, leading to the "reform" of the state radio and television system. Briefly, this entailed a sharing-out of "space" and authority which was immediately baptised "lot-splitting". Protest and reactions against this led, especially in more remote parts of the country, to the opening of a large number of local radio stations. In many cases these were spontaneous democratically self-managed creations and although they were illegal and "underground", they exerted considerable pressure to obtain the right to survive.

The "reformed" RAI-TV had taken only a few very timid steps when a further decision of the Constitutional Court (June 1976), clearly swayed by the proliferation of "pirate" stations, set limits upon the public monopoly by introducing, for the first time in the history of Italian radio-television, the principle of the coexistence at local level of independent private stations and state stations.

In response to these events and the growing protest of the state corporation, combined with that of political forces which felt slighted by the Constitutional Court, the situation is still growing more and more complex and the trends more and more divergent.

At this point an essential question arises: is the Italian "case", with all its crises and conflicts, political and social, public and private, unique on the international scene? Or is it not rather a warning to all, of a situation and of conflicts which may be more explosive in this country than elsewhere?

2. Radio: from America to Europe

"I can remember", Bertolt Brecht wrote in 1930, "how people talked about the radio when it first appeared. The newspapers were publishing ironic accounts of the veritable radio-hurricane that was laying waste to America. But the feeling one had was that this was not just another fad, but a genuine modern phenomenon. When our turn came to get the radio, that impression soon vanished. At first, we stared at each other in amazement, of course, wondering where this entertainment composed of sound could be coming from; but then the amazement gave way to a different kind of surprise: what became so astonishing were the kinds of entertainment that were coming to us over the air. The fact that it had become possible for the whole world to hear a Viennese waltz or a cookery recipe represented a real triumph for science. The radio made history; but what was its use?"

Between the time when Brecht began asking questions about the radio and now, broadcasting stations (according to a 1972 Unesco statistic) have proliferated until there are 10,000 and more of them in over 200 countries, and more than 650 million receivers have been sold. The process has gone so far that in countries like the United States and Canada there are more radio sets than people (1,339 for every 1,000)! Although these figures might seem to imply that it is the economic effects of the world-wide radio invasion which are the most important, the history of radio shows, on the contrary, that the political and social aspects take priority over mere consumption. Here we take the view that any instrument of communication is in the last analysis a means of exercising power. Even when considering the purely commercial uses of the information media, therefore, we attach most importance to the factors which define the power of those in possession of the media, rather than the economic

effects. All too often, analysis is confined to the latter, and over simplified. One need only glance through the annals of contemporary history to become aware of the political and social power of the radio. It is no accident that the first objective in a revolution or coup d'état is the capture of the national broadcasting network.

At the beginning of the century (1916) the Irish rebels used the radio during their historic uprising. In the 1930s Europe saw a massive development of broadcasting aimed at reinforcing the nazi-fascist ideology or else at undermining it, often from hidden mobile transmitters. One example was the "Freedom Station" in Genoa, an anti-nazi transmitter relentlessly hunted down by the Gestapo.

After serving as a nerve-centre in the struggles of the anti-fascist resistance movements in Spain, Italy and France, the radio's biggest period of growth, in terms of audience and market, came in the United States in the 1940s. During this phase the political use of communications media assumed a new aspect and acquired a new and seemingly neutral content: messages supposedly dictated by the laws of consumption were actually presenting a very explicit behaviour model imposed by the ruling classes.

In the following decade, towards the end of the 1950s, the Cuban rebels entrusted their broadcasting system with tasks and functions of primary importance in their revolution. A special issue of Gramma, devoted entirely to "Radio Rebelde" (18 March 1973) stated that "Radio Rebelde was an extremely valuable means of communication from the military point of view, as well as a mass information medium which played an essential political role throughout the war."

Created originally by Guevara as a strategic and military information medium, "Radio Rebelde" soon became a means of organising the people and played a part of prime importance in the destiny of the Cuban nation.

A few years later, it was the turn of the Algerian resistance to make intensive use of the radio (aided by tiny transistor sets in a country practically devoid of electricity) in carrying out another revolution.

"Suddenly," wrote Frantz Fanon, "the radio has become just as necessary as arms for the people in the struggle against French colonialism."

Employed on every political occasion and far more widely than television during periods of conflict, the radio (which was forgotten, oddly enough, in May '68 when, as Hans Magnus Enzensberger points out, the students chose to occupy the Odéon Theatre rather than a broadcasting station) has gradually come to serve very specific purposes. It speaks to everybody and to no-one in particular, so it is equally well-suited for political control, commercial programmes and collective teaching; it is used differently for each purpose.

In response to the North American theories which, from Wiener to McLuhan have tended to accept the media as they are rather than reversing the present relationship, which has long since relegated the public to a role of passivity and subordination, a series of more recent analyses and studies have placed the accent on participation by means of the media. With Walter Benjamin, the idea, which some regard as utopian, of the revolutionary use of mass art, is gaining ground. Working from Baudelaire's model and the principle of "technical reproducibility", Benjamin argues that the communications media which have developed "inside" the capitalist system can be turned "against" it. Benjamin's "alternative" use finds itself in opposition to the "abstentionist" theory of Theodore Adorno, who says it is impossible for anything created by and for capital to operate in the reverse direction and advocates instead "silence" as the only way to avoid collaborating with an evil system or becoming its accomplice.

At various points between the "alternative" and "abstentionist" extremes, a series of interesting experiments have been devised which treat communication as a means of participation and social mobilisation.

In an article on participation and mass communication, Frank Gerace Larufa, a Latin American specialist in the field, wrote: "We are hearing a lot of talk about participation, especially among those in power, who are promising a greater share of participation in its administration. This concept of participation is derived from the basic ideas of democracy, but present conditions show clearly enough that there is very little 'grass-roots' participation in most human activities. There is no government which does not promise the people more participation in its programmes, but how many of them achieve it?"

If the masses are to participate, they must become aware of their own worth. To do that, they must be able to express themselves, to put in their own word. By this I mean to suggest that the problem of participation is a problem of communication."

In the 1960s starting from these same principles, the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire began to promote experimentation on a large scale (in the north-eastern part of the country), treating the radio as a means of sensitising the masses and bringing about social change.

Freire says that man is communication and that without communication there can be neither participation nor liberation, only servitude or abuse of power.

Returning to Italy after this brief international digression to establish a few landmarks, we may say that until about 1970 the stimulus for social (or "grass-roots" or "alternative") communication was weak or non-existent. Apart from the opposition

press (which is largely the property of the political parties), the use of media such as radio and television was so firmly discouraged by those in power that a head-on collision between government and citizens became unavoidable, until, in 1974, there began the sudden and explosive proliferation of underground broadcasting stations.

3. Thirty years of public monopoly

Established immediately after the Liberation, the public monopoly of Italian radio and television came to an end in the summer of 1976 when a Constitutional Court decision introduced the principle of the "freedom of the air" at local level. However, after thirty years of virtually water-tight control of all radio and television by the government, ie the single party of the relative majority (the Christian Democrats), the monopoly had by then been approaching a state of crisis for a long time. Indeed the most impartial observers say that such flagrant unscrupulousness has rarely been displayed by any Western democracy as that witnessed in Italy in regard to the information broadcast by the RAI-TV.

This abuse of authority gave rise to a vast literature of articles, essays and assorted publications and pamphlets on the RAI-TV, all condemning its formidable consensus-creating and one-way propaganda machinery. These writings, supported by a major press campaign which is still continuing, brought to the public notice the "shady side" of the affair - that is to say the division of power and labour, the censorship and the other devices typical of an enterprise geared to the obscurantist needs of the 1950s, but unable to meet the demands of an advanced democracy. The inability of the political forces to reach agreement on a real reform of the state information system was finally resolved in an Act of Parliament, passed in 1974 and promptly buried under an avalanche of criticism and followed by a series of abnormal situations such as the mass resignations from the corporation's Board of Governors and the fierce criticisms levelled by the people in authority themselves.

Instead of remedying the lack of credibility from which the state corporation was suffering, as the supporters of the new Act hoped would be the case, this situation, which the public became increasingly familiar with and capable of evaluating as the months went by, merely made the position worse. And it was then, and in our opinion for these reasons, that the profusion of radio stations then called "pirate" stations, but since legalised, began to spring up outside the state monopoly and encouraged precisely by its deficiencies.

While we can agree that this phenomenon is primarily a reaction to the loss of credibility on the part of the state system and its increasing recourse to "lot-splitting", we can readily see that the dominant interests of local broadcasting stations are of a different

order. Chronologically, the first interests to appear on the scene were those of private associations, big firms and advertising agencies. Rejecting the rules of profit and control, a substantial grass-roots movement developed, initially composed of spontaneous groupings, small communities and political organisations. Although opposed, these were united for a time at least by almost identical demands and grounds for complaint. The pro-"control and profit" people, unhappy with the obscurantism and inefficiency of the state monopoly, wanted to replace it by introducing into Italy too the advanced capitalist model which might be termed American-style radio-television. The opposing front, driven by political and social forces, found itself obliged to fight against the monopoly in order to establish its right to self-managed information and really free communication.

Attacked from both right and left, the monopoly eventually collapsed (although continuing to exist and function at national level). Whereupon, its assailants resumed their former hostility towards each other.

The confusion was further intensified when the political forces which were used to a simple situation with a state monopoly suddenly had to define their positions with respect to the new state of affairs, without either the necessary knowledge or experience.

Meanwhile, the monopoly, totally unprepared and with plans and crises following thick and fast, degenerated into a state of total confusion (despite some efforts to reform and reorganise its services and programmes), and in the absence of any legal provisions to cope with the situation, new national and foreign broadcasting stations began operating alongside the local transmitters. The new television stations adopted a much more aggressive attitude towards the RAI-TV. The situation described here may look like just another example of "Italian-style" behaviour, but in our view the causes of all these visible anomalies (and hence of the interest shown by observers in other countries) must be sought in a wider framework embracing Italy's present political and social circumstances and the far-reaching changes which have taken place during this latest phase.

4. Political positions in relation to the monopoly and to the new situation

Although there are differences among the various European radio and television systems, they all have one common denominator: the priority of public, ie state, over private networks. However, deeper analysis in each case reveals a trend throughout Europe in recent years, towards a mutation of state radio-television systems.

Looking at the relevant laws and reforms enacted in France (transformation of the old ORTF), England (opening up to commercial networks), Holland or Luxembourg (liberalisation of some local media and transfer to private hands), we see beyond all doubt that the line of demarcation between public monopoly and private enterprise is becoming blurred to the point of extinction. The reason for this becomes clear if we consider that in a society dominated by exact laws and economic mechanisms there is increasingly little justification for the state to retain command of media as potent as the radio and television. Capitalism needs control of the information structures so badly, to advertise production and distribution as well as to impose conformity with established models, that it can no longer tolerate state supremacy in such a vital area.

Under pressure from widely differing sources, then, European governments are finding themselves compelled to give way, beginning with minor concessions which will inevitably become greater as time passes.

The Canadian example shows that even the most rational system of mixed public and private networks evolves in a direction which invariably favours the private sector to the distinct disadvantage of the public sector. When this process of "cannibalism" is not apparent in the communication structures themselves, it may be seen in the programmes and their contents. In England, for instance, after the first "underground" commercial experiments (from "Radio Caroline" to "Radio Jackie"), the official stations themselves (with the BBC in the lead) began modelling their programmes and broadcasts on those of the private stations, thus seeking to meet the new demands of commerce and industry (in this instance the music and advertising industry).

In Italy, the new broadcasting models and adjustments to the new demands are now being worked out, and in the meantime the succession of parties and governments on the political scene, all of which have long been debating the question of information as a major issue of democracy, are giving the clearest evidence - which is considerably more serious - by constantly allowing themselves to be overtaken by events, that they are quite incapable of foreseeing the consequences of their options. The amazement of the political parties at the Constitutional Court's decisions to legalise private cable television (July 1974) and local radio and television transmitters (June 1976) shows their failure to understand that the court's rulings are an implicit criticism of their own inactivity and abdication, which are themselves the primary causes of the inadequacy of the public monopoly.

Where the situation has reached a paroxysm, to put it mildly, is in the analysis of the statements of the political parties in response to the decisions of the Constitutional Court. Before July 1974 all major political forces were unanimously opposed to

the introduction of cable television. But the moment the Constitutional Court announced its decision, and presumably out of respect for the prestige of the court, those same forces declared that they were convinced of the "legitimacy" of this new and "interesting" technique. Their attitude towards local radio (and television) was the same: before the court's decision the government parties, including most of the left-wing ones, had spoken out in no uncertain terms against "freedom of the air"; but after it, the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, which had been ruthlessly extirpating the "pirates of the air", became the champion of pluralism of information, grass-roots experiments and the rights of private enterprise.

When the need for new laws and regulations to meet the new situation began to become urgent, however, back came the old positions and prejudices, translated into a general state of indecisiveness resulting from trivial distinctions, reservations and hair-splitting as futile as they were complex.

It is clear that in a situation where political and government institutions abdicate their functions of leadership and initiative, the only point of reference is the facts.

5. The liberation of "pirate" radio

Towards the end of 1974, in opposition to certain conservative political forces, and just as the parties were preparing to sign the new State Radio and Television Act, an "independent" transmitter ("Radio Bologna per Accesso Pubblico") began broadcasting locally (within a radius of approximately 20 km), backed by a co-operative of workers, students and communications experts, to show that a democratic system of information and real community participation in the management of communications was possible. Widely publicised by the press, this example quickly became the first link in a chain of "pirate" transmitters which began springing up in big cities and tiny towns all over the country. The number of these hastily installed transmitters (over 300 in less than a year, almost all operating on frequency modulation) and the impact of the movement on public opinion as well as on political and social forces, have made the Italian case unique in relation to experiments in other countries. It cannot be compared with other European countries such as England or France, where the rare attempts to establish pirate stations were quickly silenced (eg "Radio Caroline" and "Radio Veronica" in England, or "Radio Campus" in France) or manipulated from above by means of laws and provisions which diverted them from their original aims; or with the North American efforts which, with one or two exceptions (such as Station KTAO in Los Gatos, California, a totally community-run enterprise), are motivated by exclusively commercial interests.

The Italian case is worth examining in some detail. The first handout of "Radio Bologna per l'Accesso Pubblico" is given in full below:

"Listen to Radio Bologna per l'Accesso Pubblico." In July 1974 the Constitutional Court called on for a ruling in the matter of radio-television and freedom of expression, criticised in as uncertain terms the centralising and antipluralist administration of the RAI-TV and asked parliament as a matter of urgency to pass a reform Act. But now, at the end of 1974, the RAI-TV is still predominantly the expression of a single power group, discriminating daily against thousands of citizens, trade union organisations, associations and parties which are demanding the right of access.

For years the regions, trade union organisations, associations and democratic parties have been fighting to separate the RAI-TV from the executive power and secure the use of the most powerful information medium for the benefit of every member of society, without mystification and without censorship.

Convinced of the need for a really public monopoly, decentralised and open to all, and invoking the principles of the Constitutional Court itself, the Workers' Information Co-operative has decided, beginning on 23 November, to commence a series of non-commercial radio broadcasts with a view to hastening the reform of the information system and demonstrating the possibility of decentralisation and free access at a very moderate cost, on the understanding that the public authorities retain the right to make the necessary regulations."

Broadcasting programmes produced independently by workers' councils, community associations, student groups and ordinary citizens, the station remained in operation for several weeks, until it had successfully completed its publicity campaign and set an example. It then chose to stop transmitting, in order to show support for the effort to create a really "public" radio-television system.

Although national public opinion was deeply aroused by the Bologna project and it received full support from the community (the police did not even try to intervene, despite the fact that the transmitter was quite illegal), the political forces completely overlooked the significant features of this experiment (decentralisation, self-management of the communications media by the citizens) and took decisions, during the same period, relating to the allocation of responsibilities and power within the state monopoly.

Other forces, however - less highly-organised, no doubt, but more spontaneous - did learn something from "Radio Bologna per l'Accesso Pubblico", and began working together to combat the "space-splitting" and pseudo-democratisation of the RAI-TV.

Between the winter of 1975 and the summer of 1976 scores and scores of pirate stations invaded the entire country and quickly won the public ear, outflanking both the authorities and RAI-TV. In this case, as in many others, the "tide" was so strong that although non-monopoly broadcasts continued to be prohibited, the authorities preferred to take no action and were thus themselves the first to disdain the law.

Five years before, in March 1970, there had been another monopoly broadcasting experiment in Italy, that of the Danilo Dolci group: in protest against the treatment of the population of the Belice valley in Sicily, it used an underground transmitter in Partinico to inform the public of the deprivations and sufferings of the local inhabitants as a result of government neglect.

Unlike the later experiments, this voice of protest was silenced after a few hours of broadcasting by the arrival of a large body of police.

"Radio Partinico", or "Radio dei poveri cristi" (the Poor Sods' Radio) as it called itself, was run directly by the leaders of the Dolci group. When the police arrived it was broadcasting the recorded voices of poor people from the country: midwives, railway-workers, mayors, peasants and children, talking about their problems, condemning the scandalous behaviour of a political class which was held to be corrupt and incompetent without exception.

"Sicilians, Italians, men of every country" said "Radio Partinico", "Listen! A crime is being committed at this moment, an absurd and very serious crime: an entire population is being left to die. The people of the Belice Valley, the Jato Valley, the Carboi Valley, the people of Western Sicily do not want to die ... Let all true men the world over join with us in protest. Italy is the 7th industrial nation of the world and she is not capable of seeing that some of her people have a roof over their heads or the possibility of earning a living."

Only 5 years after the "Radio dei poveri cristi" experiment, similar attempts managed not only to survive but to proliferate, making attacks of a violence equal to and sometimes greater than those of the Dolci group. The explanation of this lies in the changes in the political scene and crises within the groups in power, which were unable, especially after their recent electoral setbacks, to stifle the opposition at the right moment.

6. From the voice of the community to the voice of the factory - the documents speak

We have deliberately omitted from this account of anti-monopoly experiments the commercial stations (whose number and impact are by no means marginal, and whose strategy may ultimately lead them

to dominate the "social" radios. Based on American models of radio and television, they act in complete conformity with the laws of the market and advertising, and present no new features worth special consideration.

The reason why we have preferred to concentrate on the "alternative" radio stations is because, at least in the early stages of the process, the commercial ones were operating mainly in the background and failed to obtain the kind of public support which was forthcoming for the grass-roots radios.

Consideration of a group of documents produced by the most representative stations offers a wide range of suggestions and eloquent data on the variety of their experimentation and the differences among them.

A. Radio in the service of the "movement"

The following document was produced in 1974 by a group interested in the problem of communication as a means of political mobilisation. A year later the same group began broadcasting, preparing the way for a local station in the province of Modena.

The development of electronic mass communications media, the simplification of their operation, the spread of their use, their incorporation into every sector of production, have created a painful contradiction within the traditional "public awareness" industry. This industry, which has always worked through control, has reduced feed-back and the technical possibilities of communication to the lowest level compatible with the system, and this in order to preserve a division between producers and consumers in the context of the maintenance of the present political relationships.

But when a communication network grows too large it can no longer be controlled from the centre, for its total supervision would require a control system larger than the network itself.

More children attending school for more years, the "poletarianisation" of intellectual work and the now universal access to electronics have done much to weaken central control. The thousands of unauthorised CB (Citizen Band) transmitters which have managed to operate independently and on a firm technical as well as organisational foundation bear witness to this fact. Another sign of conflict between the productive forces in the communications sector and the powers governing them may be seen in the proliferation of local and foreign broadcasts and in the inconsistencies between the recently enacted laws and the decisions of the Constitutional Court, which such laws make meaningless.

This period may be very significant for the "movement". First of all, it offers it an opportunity to break out from political action confined to selling newspapers, organising demonstrations and

writing on walls. Secondly, giving the movement an opportunity to reach a level of communication at which "mass" mobilisation and organisation become possible is a challenge, and a challenge which can either be taken up and thrown back or may lead to a subsequent leap ahead of the capitalist ideology reproduction technologies market. Setting aside television, whose present cost is prohibitive for the movement (especially since the recent rise of more than 30% in the price of equipment) and considering radio alone, it has now become technically, politically and economically possible to employ it in such a way as to transform it into a channel of communications at the disposal of the masses.

Frequency modulation, the low cost of recording and transmitting equipment, and the possibility - mainly through the telephone - of involving listeners directly in a live broadcast, have made it possible to join together separate existing political forces (students' unions and works' councils, district committees, feminist groups, etc) and give them a political voice.

The management of these endeavours must not be viewed in terms of the traditional ideological relationship between the group producing the information and the listener receiving it or being subjected to it. Provided that some structure can be established to link the individual organisations together, the problem reduces itself to one measuring the time that can be allocated to people from outside without destroying the general pattern of the broadcasts.

The first broadcasts will be of music and news bulletins combined with continuous feedback and these will be followed by more elaborate programmes and debates produced collectively with grass-roots groups in the receiving area.

The originality of this plan lies in the medium we intend to use, in the relationship that the radio can build up with the movement. But no discrimination must enter into the relations of any of the social components to one another. On the contrary, the object is to achieve the fullest possible unity in their relations at both the planning and the transmitter management stages.

B. Radio in the service of the workers

The following passage is taken from a letter written by workers in the Turin Singer factory who, in late 1975, desiring to "socialise" their campaign against lay-offs, decided to set up a radio station run entirely by themselves - "Radio Singer".

"To the President of the RAI-TV, the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, and the Parliamentary Committee for the Supervision of Broadcasting.

At 10 o'clock this morning we commenced our broadcasts on a frequency band between 100.00 and 104.00 Mhz using frequency modulation. The final output power is between 10 and 15 watts but we normally use the minimum output power.

This entirely local transmitter is not designed to offer a general broadcasting service in contravention of Art. 1 of Act No. 103 of 14 April 1975; but to provide information designed to awaken the interest of the local population and increase their participation.

This action is the result of our need to communicate, a need which is not satisfied by the present radio and television monopoly which, in spite of the reform, still does not give workers and their organisations the means of direct expression. Article 6 of the above-mentioned Act does - though unsatisfactorily - confer a 'right of access' but this has not become a reality because in the present state of implementation of the reform all activity has been brought to a standstill by internal struggles over the sharing out of authority.

It is also, and above all, our intention to offer the community, and especially the local authorities, social and political bodies, religious, cultural and co-operative associations, a social communication service.

We believe, moreover, that our action is legal under Arts. 2 and 21 of the Constitution of the Italian Republic and Art. 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Cordially yours, Radio Singer (Voice of the employees of Singer, Turin)."

Here is the text of the communiqué issued by Radio Singer when it commenced broadcasting:

"At the Leini Singer plant 1,800 workers find themselves put down at the Cassa Integrazione for 0 hours following a decision by American big business and are due to be laid off on 1 January 1976. The multinational corporations continue to impose their wishes on the people, acting over the heads of governments and following their own interests in preference to those of society as a whole. This is why the Singer plant is to be closed down. And it is against this process, as well as to defend their right to work, that the Singer workers have been battling for many months. But, as in the case of other factories fighting for the same or similar reasons, the authorities tend to draw a curtain of silence over these problems and it is only the workers' demonstrations that regularly draw public attention to them. The capitalist press and the RAI-TV give insufficient and piecemeal news and have every interest in keeping things as quiet as possible, so as to prevent any real link from

being forged between the workers and the population, between the out-of-work, the under-employed and those who are productive; in other words, they are shamelessly trying to cover up the truth.

They are attempting to camouflage or minimise the consequences of choices (such as subordination to multinational corporation), that have, if not caused at least aggravated, the nation-wide fall in basic production and in employment rates.

Our response to this conspiracy of silence and half-truths is to fight back, just as we are fighting against the shutting down of the factory. Singer's workers have the right to be heard. It is their duty to explain the reasons for their struggle. They must be heard. Accurate information is the way to greater solidarity.

The reform of the RAI-TV established the 'right of access' (Art. 6 of Act 103 (1975)), but like all the other slight reforms, this one has become a dead letter. Eight months after the Act's entry into force the rules governing the right of access have still not been laid down and so social, political and cultural forces are still unable to express themselves. It is for this reason alone that we have decided to open a Singer radio station. It is solely in order to express ourselves - since the RAI-TV will not let us do so - that we have decided to take this course. Our aim is to communicate with those who are fighting like us and with us, with the people in this area who like us feel the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads, and are facing the threat of lay-off or worse in whole localities like Leini or the Lanzo and Upper Suze valleys.

We think that considering the ineffectiveness of the trade unions and the political and social situation this autumn, the problem of democratic information has become more urgent and acute than ever before.

For this reason (in addition to our need to continue our struggle and publicise it by some action reaching the entire area), we have taken an initiative which we think is very important: we have begun operating a local radio station, broadcasting within a radius of 10 km (Leini, Volpiano, Settimo T., Borgaro, Lombardore Brandizzo and North Turin).

Its object is:

- to promote debate, communication and contact not only between Singer and other factories but among all workers, and to help bring workers as a class closer to other sections of society;
- to revive the campaign for a democratic system of information, in opposition to the misinformation and manipulation imposed on us by the RAI-TV.

This effort, making use of a pre-existing space, is by no means incompatible with the fight which we have been waging as a movement and shall continue to wage at the level of the RAI-TV, the first result of which, however inadequate, has been the right of access.

We think this action may make another dent in the monopoly and help to promote the foundation of a system managed by the people. In addition, this radio station will be open to all and is not to remain a private effort of the workers at Singer alone."

C. Radio for the marginals

The following brief document was produced by "Radio Alice", a station broadcasting from Bologna and largely run by intellectuals and students, which calls itself "the voice of the rejected":

"Alice watches, plays, jumps and loiters among the sun-drenched leaves and then skips off - goes somewhere else. Yet everything fits together. Words connect, explain, repeat and won't stand for interruption; they organise, participate and criticise.

It's like an invitation to dinner where you are only to talk shop and are not given anything to eat.

A silence. The subject's changed. Now she's upset, she's hissing, she says you're wrong... The silence, the sense of alienation, the things 'unsaid', the things 'to be said': they are frightening you.

The programmes are full of features, crowded together as in a newspaper: How we look at things ... Half an hour with your Carlo - Folk Music Programme - All Jazz - News bulletins at 1 and 2 and 3 o'clock ... Alice is hissing and shouting, cursing, interrupting, exploding.

People have returned to the stage at the Odéon, they're going to the Paris theatre with microphones and credit cards in their hands. They're asking us to join forces with them; our needs are again being represented by delegate 'spokesmen', in return for a promise to talk about it all tomorrow.

Try to explain what springtime is.

Here's a direct phone call from the Technical Institute: 'We have taken over the Principal's office and are ringing you on his telephone, just listen to him yelling ... He wanted to forbid an open ballot and mess around with us this term.'

That's better!

Desire for power over words of command (discorso d'ordine) or power of desire to break down the order of words (l'ordine del discorso).

The radio of 'participation', or the radio of alienation? In the first case language is one: that of the speaker, announcing that the event has taken place. He talks about something which means something else and can never be grasped because it's already gone.

A mirror,

In this context all attempts at imitation are utterly absurd: dialects and accents are not tolerated. In the second case something in the language keeps escaping: you can hear it in the laughter, the hesitations, the word the speaker can't find but won't use another in its place, the ers and ums and the pauses.

All right, let's talk about alienation. It's not possible to move from one subject to another (from inside the RAI to outside the RAI). There's a different subject. The new subject is collective and it doesn't talk. Or rather, it talks when it wants to. Silence is a hole. Let the holes grow, don't be afraid of them, go ahead and fall into them and come out the other side.

Wonderland.

Another direct phone call:

'We are women workers who've been striking for the last 2 hours, we want you to play some music for us and we want to talk to you about the 35-hour week, because it's time we were talking about it in collective agreements.'

And another direct phone call:

'You lousy communists, we'll make you pay dearly for your precious radio, we know who you are.'

And another one:

'We belong to the Rizzoli Hospital anti-fascist committee, don't worry: just call us if anything happens, we're here around the clock.'

The rising spiral of the value of capital in the movement of value signs must be broken (not by appropriation of goods to interrupt the D-M-D' cycle, but by a wildcat strike inside the movement of the D-D' value sign itself).

The language must be broken too, the language of machines, the language of the ethics of work, of productivity.

./.

'You are cordially invited not get up this morning, to stay in bed with somebody, to make your own musical instruments and weapons of war.'

Radio Alice is obscene (literally, that means off stage).

Offstage she certainly is. But obscene?

Is there anything in our lives, our needs, that isn't obscene to the police and the penpushers? Our needs, our sexuality, our body, our longing to sleep in the morning ... our desire. They've been hidden for centuries, submerged, denied, unmentioned. The blackmail of poverty, the discipline of labour, the class system, sacrifice, the general interest: they have silenced the voice of the body. Since time began and forever more, our time has been vowed to work.

But beyond poverty, our body, our desire and the appropriation of our working time all speak out against work.

Radio Alice has moved into this empty space and that is why it is 'obscene'.

Another phone call, the best yet:

Nobody speaks, nothing but a saxophone playing for a few minutes; we're sure it was Majakovsky."

D. Radio for the public

The text published by a group of media producers and technicians in northern Italy is an appeal to the parties, trade unions and democratic organisations for a decentralised "public" communications network not external to the RAI-TV monopoly:

"For the last few years in Italy the use of light communications media (such as video-tapes) has been spreading. The new media have helped to create a new demand for information and this has developed into a very often contradictory process in which the chief stage has been the approval of the Act reforming the RAI-TV. Among the chief users, or potential users, of the new media are local authorities. The experiments now in progress (most of which have been instituted by left-wing municipal governments) are stagnating, although they were favourably received at first and on balance their contribution has been positive.

The direction given to the testing of the working hypothesis that greater public participation could be achieved by satisfying the demand for fuller knowledge of the workings of public affairs has been the cause of this impasse. Management structures have almost always been linked to press agencies and their virtually exclusively univocal administration, unable to keep up with

growing national demands, has incited left-wing political forces, trade union organisations and democratic organisations to campaign for a reform of information management. In so far as, with special reference to the application of the RAI-TV reforms, local authorities today have to take an active part in this battle, they must be able to place the audio-visual media in a broader context capable of mobilising these democratic forces. As regards the functions of the inspectorates of education and culture in the towns and provinces, in particular, the policy of the local authorities should be presented and programmed with a view to a democratic management of the mass media in harmony with the other forces working in the same direction. The technical and management structures capable of giving practical effect to programme demands at grass-roots level: from schools, districts, factories, cultural and sporting associations etc.

The demands are explained in various ways: the need for specific, local and sectoral information within a single entity; for reciprocal information about various grass-roots groups and local administrations; for information about larger problems combined with regional and inter-regional socialisation.

All of this is related to the more complex problem of information itself, and in this context local authorities must promote management solutions to meet those demands. An operation such as that envisaged in this report should achieve the following results:

- the decentralisation of radio and television services by regional authorities;
- the facilitation of the implementation of the RAI convention, without which the monopoly would end automatically in 6 years' time;
- participation by the people in the management of the mass media;
- a rapprochement between users and the public corporation thanks to technologically valid information;
- the satisfaction of legitimate creative aspirations which arise daily and have not yet found any appropriate means of expressing their undoubted potential for socialisation;
- the exclusion of all retrograde initiatives seeking to escape public control in order to boost capitalist interests and speculation.

This would provide a fair response to the demand for change at grass-roots level and transform a general urge into a real and conscious movement, which is the only way to ensure that the

reform will be put into practice. It would also weaken the reactionary forces whose demands, fair and real but as yet unorganised, tend in an opposite direction towards the destruction of the monopoly and reinforcement of capitalist interests so that they may exploit the mass media for profit alone, with everything that implies. What can also be achieved is a democratically managed public information service, the only realistic alternative to a takeover of the media by an oligarchy."

7. Appraisal of experiments and comparison with other countries

The texts quoted above show that even within the social and democratic "front" of the radio (the other, or commercial front, as we have seen, has greater unity and very different aims), there are wide divergences.

Texts A and C are the product of a plainly revolutionary political position:

- a. they appeal to the "movement" as a reference for communication;
- b. they rule out all possibility of compromise with institutional forces;
- c. they want unity "among the masses" by means of a totally self-managed internal communications system;
- d. they see in the RAI-TV the instrument of the enemy, to be fought by organising a counter-information network.

Texts B and D, on the other hand, while criticising the information policy of the left-wing parties:

- a. see these experiments as an alternative, not an opposition;
- b. agree that the RAI-TV has a national function to perform which clearly needs to be redefined but not abolished;
- c. want the functions of management and co-ordination to be delegated to local authorities (regions and municipalities);
- d. agree that "horizontal" communication must be encouraged but maintain that this does not preclude a system of communication between "top" and "bottom".

Both believe that the point of departure must be control by the workers, but one group attacks the logic of delegating information to a party or trade union organisation whereas the other wants to exert pressure on the parties and trade unions to make them abandon their abstentionist or moderate positions and commit themselves to more advanced courses.

Comparison of these positions with experiments in other countries of Europe and America (eg recent "community" radio experiments in England and the United States) shows that:

- a. The concept of "community" is foreign to Italian thinking. In other countries the point of departure for alternative communications is very often the community, taken in its widest sense, but in Italy the point of reference is always the working class or the school or the district or the nation as a whole.
- b. In other countries experiments in alternative communications depend on national or local governments (cf Canada), or are declared illegal (and where they are condemned to clandestinity they never achieve the solidity and strength of a movement), whereas in Italy the phenomenon was born and germinated in illegality but is growing openly, without recourse to clandestinity, and has actually been legalised in defiance of government decisions.

8. Comments and criticism

Between the eruption of this process (Winter 1975) and its legalisation (Summer 1976) a great many attitudes have been expressed on the subject, not only by political and social groups but by specialists, experts, cultural authorities and journalists as well.

Here too, the best thing may be to allow the various parties to speak for themselves.

A. Response of the RAI-TV

In the course of several interviews on the growth of the "free" radios, the (Socialist) President of the RAI-TV has made the following statements: "What lies ahead for the state radio and television broadcasting monopoly? ... Objectively, the monopoly no longer exists. It was justifiable as long as the radio and television broadcasting system was regarded as a public service. Now, polluted by the presence of the private radio stations, the monopoly is being challenged. In any event, I think that to maintain that no alternative oligarchic systems will be set up is a fallacy. No-one can prevent secret contacts between private local stations. Besides, the local dimension was not clearly defined in the decision of the Constitutional Court ... I wonder, in fact, how the public service will manage to co-exist alongside the private ones. It will undoubtedly have to face many difficulties resulting from competition which will bring about a lowering of the cultural level we hoped to achieve in the state monopoly."

The (Christian Democrat) Director General of the RAI-TV would appear, from the following statement, to hold a contrary opinion:

"The decision of the Constitutional Court? ... It neither weakens nor threatens the services managed by the RAI, for in a sense the Court confirmed the primacy of the public service and any feeling of alarm for the radio and television broadcasting monopoly, which is in danger, is quite uncalled for."

B. The position of the relative majority party

For a better understanding of the reasons behind such inconsistency within the governing body of the corporation itself, it is necessary to look more closely at the position of the party with the relative majority, ie the Christian Democrats. After 30 years in control of the broadcasting monopoly, it has realised that the new Act has brought its absolute supremacy to an end and it is looking to the private radio for a means of reinforcing its own power (outside the monopoly, hence in unexplored territory). This is the context of the statements of the party leaders who see the "free" radio as a means of destroying the monopoly rather than improving it. In 1975 the party secretary said that the "idea that the Christian Democrats are automatically in favour of the monopoly is one of the many clichés which we should verify and look at critically in the light of our principles and a correct view of reality".

C. The position of the Communist Party

After the confiscation of one "free" radio station, "Radio Bra-Onde Rosse", and thus before the liberalisation decision of the Constitutional Court, the local federation of the Communist Party, questioned on the subject, replied in these terms:

"The Communists' position is built upon these few basic principles: (1) the only alternative to a public monopoly over radio and television broadcasting is a takeover of the entire information industry by the big financial trusts (one need only look at what is happening to the written press); (2) the public radio and television monopoly is justifiable only if the RAI were radically reformed so that objective and full information and a new way of producing programmes through decentralised structures will strengthen the professional autonomy of journalists and cultural personnel as well as the ability to stimulate worthwhile fringe activities capable of bringing the RAI into close and permanent contact with the changing Italian scene; (3) all local efforts in this field must be seen as positive, with one reservation in respect of 2 serious mistakes to be avoided: a. nothing must be done which would help to aggravate the political and social divisions in our country by means of abstract ideological oppositions: a "red" radio is no guarantee in itself of objectivity, any more than a RAI divided between the

Christian Democrats and the left-centre would be, and it would certainly not strengthen the democratic foundation of the country; b. a huge coalition of cultural and social forces needs to be formed for the democratic administration of a reformed RAI and each local effort must be an irreplaceable unit in this general conflict.

D. The position of the regions

We can see from the texts quoted thus far that references to the regions crop up often in discussions of local broadcasting. Under Italian legislation, the regions are a decentralised form of government and they have been striving for some time to transform the radio and television into an instrument capable of meeting their needs. At one time Emilia-Romagna was the leading region in experimenting with mass communications and participation. A paper produced by Emilia-Romagna in 1973 stressed the importance of communication as a vehicle for real mass participation rather than a machine for imposing conformity:

"The basic point is democratic information seen as a means of participation. The fight for reform should not stop at instituting democratic structures, whatever their nature, in the new radio-television organisation; it should extend to a new information policy aimed not at seeking and organising a consensus from above but at becoming an essential instrument in participation and thus in the overthrow of the traditional concept of information."

After intensive experimentation designed to enable districts, factories, schools and villages to take independent control of the new communications media (in particular the audio-visual media, in preparation for regional radio and television) and despite all the publicity lavished upon the experiment, this region also went astray in the meanders of the RAI reform. At that time no-one saw that this type of decentralisation and participation really could have strengthened the reform movement, had it been followed by other examples. The authorities, on the contrary, fearing that the regional efforts would have the opposite effect and drive the state reform even further away, preferred to abandon their current projects and transfer their efforts to the negotiating table.

Three years later, at a congress in Aosta (October 1976) the regions were forced to recognise their error; after letting themselves be outstripped by local and private broadcasters they found themselves back where they had started, except that this time they were weaker and had lost credibility, precisely because they had let slip the opportunity to be themselves the local broadcasters - ie public instead of private - to lead the way.

The conclusions of the congress contain this statement:
"The contradictions and delays in the reform of the RAI-TV, the recovery of the conservative forces, the private assault upon the

monopoly, and decision No. 202 of the Constitutional Court have combined to create a situation which, if not quickly altered, may well lead to further restriction of the freedom of expression and communication of all citizens, as a result of the predominance of powerful private monopolist forces.

Structural processes are now taking place which not only jeopardise the possibility of renewing and extending our democracy but which directly affect the interests and ability of the social forces, the intellectuals and all Italian citizens, to participate independently in international affairs."

This cry of alarm produced by the decision of the Constitutional Court, and the effort to recover areas which the regions had previously regarded as theirs by right but which were now being taken away from them by the "private" stations, ultimately revealed, instead of any real ability to take the lead in a movement towards the decentralisation of national radio and television, their helplessness in the face of future realities.

E. The opinion of the press

The press has also been active of late in the matter of the free radio stations. Although it would be sociologically inaccurate and politically ingenuous to suppose that the press can have an independent opinion (independent, that is, of the pressure groups or powers on which it depends), it may be relevant at this point to quote from 2 passages which give some indication of the extremes expressed.

The Espresso, a non-religious weekly of radical origin, has long been opposed to the radio and television monopoly and hence in favour of the free radios:

"How many listeners there are nobody knows, nor can even estimate approximately. Many of the 600 stations which sprang up like mushrooms last summer have tried to reckon their numbers by various devices. The easiest method, and the one most commonly used, is the telephone call. A good many of the stations invite their listeners to phone in to the studios. For every phone call received it is estimated that 6 other callers get an 'engaged' signal, and that not more than 10% of all listeners ever pick up the receiver and dial the free station's number.

But some have made real surveys. These claim to establish that between 50 and 350 of every 1,000 Romans listen to the free radios, which means an audience of between roughly 200,000 and 1,200,000. Another figure, although not very precise, can be regarded as significant: sales of sets equipped to receive frequency modulation (that is, capable of receiving the free stations) have recently risen by 60%. Now, after building up a comparatively large empire, the free radios are finding themselves under cross-fire."

Rinascita, a communist weekly, defends the monopoly and sees the free radios as eroding and disintegrating the state organisation:

"Four months ago, according to an RAI survey, there were 67 local radio stations. At Christmas, a specialist periodical said there were 87, and 52 private TV stations. A few days ago, at a congress held in Florence and Rome, people were talking of 300. In the meantime Mr Simonacci, a Christian Democrat member of parliament, stated in a recent legislative motion that Italy might be invaded by 'hundreds if not thousands of radio-television stations'; and he was immediately echoed in another motion, by the curious tandem formed by the Socialist Ruggero Orlando and the Liberal Baslini. Umberto Eco, writes of an exploration of the Milan air, that it is now like New York, and his readers understand that progress is here at last. So the way is clear to give free rein to our fantasies. This multiplication of hundreds and thousands of aerials is an expression of release from years of frustration caused by the authoritarianism of the RAI, and also by a lack of awareness in the general public of the full potential of television. Local radio and television are igniting enthusiasm and sparking off initiative, the airwaves have become fair ground for conquest, information's land of milk and honey.

What makes this confusion so serious is the fact that it is so widespread, coupled with the fact that it is becoming increasingly entangled with different demands as regards both the substance of information and the ways of communicating it. The truth is that the air is not open to everybody nor can everybody bear the cost of its permanent general use."

9. Political positions and proposals for the future

So far we have seen that the Italian free radio phenomenon has been primarily a political event. From the sociological viewpoint, it is interesting to see how the various political forces have taken up differing and sometimes opposing attitudes to the freedom of the air, depending on their historical and ideological backgrounds.

For example:

- a. The middle-of-the-road and right-wing forces which dominated the state broadcasting monopoly in the past are now tending, as conditions change and private channels have become legalised, to adopt a liberal, permissive attitude which will enable them to control information through commercial processes.
- b. The traditional left-wing political movements, and the reformist left in general, were fierce opponents of the monopoly (which signified domination and abuse of power on the part of government); but now that the political and social climate has changed (that is, now that these

forces are drawing nearer to government themselves, and are gradually moving out of the "opposition" position), their response to the liberalisation of broadcasting is a grim defence of the public monopoly which they hope can prevent the takeover of all broadcasting by private and commercial forces, combined with criticism and proposals for the reform of the monopoly.

- c. Less highly-organised political and social forces, such as the grass-roots groups and youth and revolutionary left-wing movements which have always been excluded from the monopoly and had no hopes of occupying new territory, are now tending, having secured a base for independent operations, to regard both the monopoly and private and commercial enterprises as an impediment to their freedom of expression. They are suspicious of both institutional agreements and party intervention, and tend to set up self-managed information systems without reference to any form of regulation or limitation.

Now, looking ahead to the possible future developments of this situation, especially since the introduction and legalisation of freedom of the air in Italy, we find a similar variety in the reform projects proposed by the different parties:

- a. Centrist and conservative forces have combined private and monopolistic demands (this may look like a contradiction but is not), calling for both public and commercial channels and networks, allegedly distinct but in fact uniformly dependent upon the play of economic forces and in most cases financed by advertising (the RAI-TV estimates that the publicity potential of radio and television in Italy would amount to something like 322 thousand million lire annually. As the RAI itself accounts for only a little over 90 thousand million, this means that the private stations represent a market of more than 200 thousand million!). If this were the case, even with hundreds of networks and channels, the freedom of the air would ultimately depend upon the 3 or 4 economic giants handling publicity (at present there are only 2 agencies active in local radio and television). In this case, an apparent pluralism would become a purely quantitative phenomenon actually representing a return to oligarchy, which is only another form of monopoly.
- b. The traditional left-wing forces do not want to give the private market access to the control of radio and television information and are accordingly anxious to restrict their operations as much as possible, to keep them exclusively local and set very definite limitations on advertising. At the same time, conscious of the objective limits to freedom of expression implied by the various forms of public monopoly (at least as they have existed hitherto), they want to

reform the state corporation by introducing pluralism and democratisation. For example, here is a proposal by a communist expert:

"A network which is fundamentally public, having both national and local dimensions, divided into several channels with several autonomous but connectable transmitters, revolving around the RAI-TV and its broadcasting stations but also including outside transmitters formed locally and organised according to the criteria of social management and mass production: these are the specifications which should be met by the local radio and television stations which already exist. In such a context the RAI-TV would act as a national structure, a factor of unity and also a stimulant for local organisations ..."

- c. The revolutionary left-wing political and social forces accuse the right wing of trying to destroy the monopoly in order to restore economic and social privilege elsewhere. They criticise the reformist projects, taxing them with standing midway between free and non-free, public and private, national and local, class interests and "inter-classism". In place of this they want "unified" "left-wing", "self-managed" broadcasting stations. The daily paper Manifesto says, for example:

"Left-wing, entirely non-sectarian transmitter units must now be set up. Support must be given to projects which are self-managed by those receiving broadcasts, and built upon basic realities, the problems of the factory and the local citizens. This task is assuredly not one which can be entrusted to the bureaucracies of local authorities which would exclude the people and offer us an inferior copy of the RAI-TV ... That is why it is necessary to fight for alternate management of the air and to oppose all forms of legal control and capitalist strangulation".

10. Factors for assessment

From the variety of positions adopted and the substantial differences in purpose expressed by the political forces, parties and movements, we see clearly that the problem of information is first and foremost a problem of power. Thus the characteristic assumptions of Western cultures, which see the media as a means of producing organised uniformity by "community development" exercises or "regulated participation" (of the experiment in Quebec, Canada, or Saul Alinsky's methods in the United States), can be made relevant to Italy but not entirely so, because the conflict between classes and the interests they represent has reached a level increasingly less amenable to reconciliation.

From the purely political aspect of power, the proliferation of free radios in Italy presents the 2 extreme features of the problem. On one side (the non-commercial transmitters), it is a manifestation of a force or combination of forces tending to generalise freedom of expression and increase the community's capacity for self-organisation. On the other (the purely commercial stations), it is a manifestation of interests whose aim is to restrict individual and community freedoms for the sake of conformity and maximum profit.

However, the specialists may find other aspects worth looking at. Especially where the process has taken place in conditions of freedom and autonomy, it is very important from the viewpoint of a "collective" language.

A. The problem of language

These conditions have been met by several stations which are either in remote localities or in villages or urban districts where group and party control is weak or non-existent, and the entire community has been able to express itself with great incisiveness and imagination. In such cases communication becomes a challenge, essential to collective organisation and to the knowledge and fulfilment of personal relations.

The broadcasts of these stations tend to discard traditional features like political newscasts, inter-party debates, interviews conducted and interpreted by a commentator, talks with people in the public eye (sociologists etc) and are primarily managed by the protagonists themselves. Here we see put into practice the principle of the "subject" of communication: people remain themselves, with their full complement of ability, potential and desires. It is opposed to the principle of authoritarian mass communication which tends on the contrary, to treat individuals as "objects" of information like vases to be filled, as Paulo Freire puts it, with messages and slogans. These broadcasts also provide information which can be actively "used", rather than "ideological" or "persuasive" information. In a word, they are dialogue as distinct from monologue.

B. The problem of participation

When participation at this level arises as a true necessity and is practised by the people without being implanted from above, information becomes horizontal - an instrument for the exercise of freedom in opposition to vertical information which is an instrument for the exercise of authority (and in most cases a vehicle of authoritarianism). The radio station is a kind of "tom-tom of the collective subject" reaching out to all social interests and at the same time nourishing the inventiveness, imagination and creativity of every individual. "The collective subject", as one "alternative" newspaper has written, "long relegated to the wings by history, is now returning to the stage. First, it moved into the schools and public squares, and it is now invading communications as well."

C. The problem of control

Although the power structures have limited the achievements of grass-roots initiatives, the opportunities for reciprocal conditioning have been more productive than might appear to be the case. The pirate transmitter "Radio Caroline", back in the 1960s, is a good example: the British state radio (BBC) succeeded in putting the pirate station out of commission, but took advantage of it by adopting its methods and instituting round-the-clock music broadcasts.

In Italy as well - and not only in the field of music - the state corporation has, while attacking the alternative stations, assiduously assimilated their ideas and content because they were so successful. Thus conditioning often takes place from weaker to stronger, and it is no accident that the state corporation is now turning its attention to the problems of women, young people, soldiers, homosexuals etc.

Mutual conditioning and imitation cannot take place only at the level of content and form, however, and not at the level of control. The substantial differences between the proposals emanating from the "bottom" and those received at the "top" lie in this very question of the management and control of structures, not content.

The feminists, soldiers and homosexuals allowed to speak out may bear a physical resemblance to their brothers and sisters who are daily deprived of this right, but the resemblance is only superficial when one group has control over the other and when relationships remain as authoritarian and vertical as before.

11. A phenomenon in the making

The Italian "case" may be of interest mainly because it is so varied and in such a state of flux. Radio is an instrument like any other - one which may be more intensively exploited today than before by virtue of its impact, reach, compactness, but it remains an instrument and thus it depends upon those who control it or are striving to gain control of it.

The process described here has many positive aspects, but the risks and dangers involved are no less numerous. Some of them have to do with the takeover by private enterprise, others with the tendency of local stations to turn inward and become permanent "ghettos", so to speak.

Some people accuse the free radios of opening a breach for the great commercial interests; others condemn the government and parties for dividing up the air between them and thus depriving the people of any means of communication.

In any event, the Italian case is interesting because of its complexity and because it is "open" to a number of possible solutions. As we observe it, with all its contradictions and prospects for future development, we see it as a many-faceted raw material for research, all the more valuable for being still in motion and having frozen into no final form.